

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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TAGS: PBOR, PINT, CI, CU, JM, PN, NU, VE, US
SUBJECT: CONVERSTATION BETWEEN PRESIDENT PEREZ AND SENATOR BENTSEN

1. ON JANUARY 9 SENATOR LLOYD BENTSEN (D-TEXAS) WAS THE GUEST OF VENEZUELAN PRESIDENT PEREZ FOR A TWO HOUR WORKING DINNER. OTHER GUESTS WERE FOREIGN MINISTER CONSALVI, AMBASSADOR VAKY AND THE PRESIDENT'S INTERPRETER, DR. GONZALO PLAZA.

2. THE GREAT BULK OF THE CONVERSATION DEALT WITH THE PANAMA CANAL TREATY. PRESIDENT PEREZ EXPRESSED HIS STRONG CONVICTION IT SHOULD BE RATIFIED. IN THE COURSE OF THE CONVERSATION HE MADE THE FOLLOWING POINTS:

--IT WOULD BE A GREAT TRAGEDY IF THE SENATE REJECTS THE TREATY; HE DOES NOT WANT EVEN TO THINK OF THE CONSEQUENCES; VIRTUALLY ANYTHING COULD HAPPEN.

--A REJECTION OF THE TREATY WOULD HAND A TAILOR-MADE ISSUE TO THE LEFTISTS AND ULTRA-LEFTISTS IN THE REGION. HE WOULD NOT BE SURPRISED IF THEY ARE NOT ALREADY PLANNING A STRATEGIC CAMPAIGN TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF A REJECTION. THE PRESSURE ON FRIENDS OF THE U.S. AND ON DEMOCRACIES WOULD BE GREAT, AND THE ISSU
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WILL BE USED TO UNDERCUT RELATIONS WITH THE U.S.

--THIS SITUATION WILL BE PARTICULARLY INTENSE IN THE CARIBBEAN. CASTRO HAS SOUGHT, THROUGH HIS AFRICAN POLICY, TO ACHIEVE LEADERSHIP AND INFLUENCE WITH THE BLACK POPULATION IN THE CARIBBEAN. THE U.S. AND VENEZUELA, THROUGH THEIR PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE EFFORT,

SEEK TO COUNTER THIS. BUT REJECTION OF THE TREATY WILL GIVE CASTRO A DISTINCT ADVANTAGE IN UNDERCUTTING BOTH VENEZUELA AND THE U.S. IN THE REGION.

--IF THE TREATY IS REJECTED, TORRIJOS WILL HAVE TO REACT IN SOME WAY. THE POSSIBILITY OF RIOTS OR SABOTAGE EXISTS. THE U.S. WOULD FIND IT MUST TAKE SOME ACTION TO PROTECT ITS INTERESTS. THIS HE WOULD FULLY UNDERSTAND AND EXPECT, BUT U.S. INTERVENTION TO DO SO WOULD AROUSE THE RESISTANCE OF ALL LATIN AMERICA.

--HE BELIEVES CASTRO WOULD TAKE ADVANTAGE TORRIJOS' FRUSTRATION AND NEED TO REACT TO INVOLVE HIMSELF IN THIS ISSUE. ONE SHOULD NOT BE SURPRISED, THE PRESIDENT SAID, IF A SITUATION EVEN AROSE IN WHICH CUBA WOULD HELP TORRIJOS MILITARILY AND PANAMA WOULD INVITE THE USSR TO BUILD A SEA LEVEL CANAL.

--ON THE OTHER HAND BY RATIFYING THE TREATY THE U.S. WOULD CONSOLIDATE AN INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMATIC TRIUMPH. THE TREATY HAS THE SUPPORT OF THE WORLD; ITS SIGNING EFFECTIVELY SILENCED CASTRO AND ISOLATED THE ULTRA LEFT. TO COMPLETE THE PROCESS WOULD STRENGTHEN THE U.S., ITS IMAGE, AND THE DEMOCRACIES WHICH SUPPORTED THE EFFORT.

--IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE TO ATTEMPT TO ENVISAGE AND PRESCRIBE FOR EVERY FUTURE CONTINGENCY; TO DO SO REQUIRES SPELLING OUT CONDITIONS AND TERMS THAT ARE HUMILIATING TO PANAMA. THE REALITY IS THAT THE CONFIDENTIAL

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U.S. IS A GREAT POWER AND WILL CARRY OUT ITS INTEREST ANYWAY. IT DOES NOT HAVE TO SPELL OUT EVERY EVENTUALITY.

--THERE IS A MORAL ISSUE INVOLVED. THE PANAMANIAN PEOPLE HAVE UNDERSTANDABLE AND JUST ASPIRATIONS TO CONTROL THEIR TERRITORY. IT WOULD BE AS IF A U.S. CITIZEN HAD TO REQUEST FOREIGN PERMISSION TO CROSS FROM ONE SIDE OF THE MISSISSIPPI TO THE OTHER.

--THE U.S., THE PRESIDENT SAID, MUST NOW SHOW ITS GREATNESS. IT SHOWED ITS GREATNESS WHEN IT BUILT THE CANAL; IT SHOULD NOW SHOW ITS GREATNESS IN BEING WILLING TO RECOGNIZE NATIONAL ASPIRATIONS IN RETURNING THE CANAL.

--HE RECOGNIZED THE DIFFICULTIES WHICH THE SENATOR DESCRIBED, THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL SCENE, THE FEELINGS OF THE U.S. PEOPLE. BUT LEADERS SHOULD LEAD, AND THE U.S. SHOULD DO WHAT IS RIGHT, FOR ITS LONG TERM INTEREST IN THE WORLD.

3. ON ANOTHER TOPIC, THE PRESIDENT SAID HE CONSIDERED THE CHILEAN PLEBISCITE WAS "RIGGED" AND DID NOT REPRESENT THE PEOPLE.

4. HE EXPRESSED THE BELIEF THAT IT WAS IMPORTANT THAT JAMAICA BE

BROUGHT BACK TO THE WEST'S SIDE, AND THAT THE MULILATERAL
EFFORT TO EXTEND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE WAS ESSENTIAL. HE
STATED MANLEY WAS NOT A COMMUNIST, AND THAT HE WANTED AN
ALTERNATIVE TO DEPENDENCE ON CASTRO.MANLELY
HAD WRITTEN HIM A LETTER, THE PRESIDENT SAID, DESCRIBING HIS VISIT
WITH PRESIDENT CARTER IN THE MOST GLOWING AND WARMEST TERMS, THE PRE-
SIDENT ATTRIBUTED MANLEY'S RELATIONS WITH CASTRO TO DATE, INCLUDING
THE VISIT THE LATTER MADE TO KINGSTON, TO THE FACT THAT CASTRO HAD
HELPED MANLEY WHEN OTHERS DID NOT. MANLEY RESPECTS CASTRO, BUT, THE
PRESIDENT INSISTED, HE DOES NOT WANT TO BE IN THE CUBAN ORBIT.

5. THE PRESIDENT ALSO EXPRESSED HIS CONCERN AND INDIGNATION OVER
THE ASSASSINATION OF PEDRO CHAMORRO IN MANAGUA.

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